

Lenora Ashford

Questions for Appointees to the Michigan Technological University Board of Control

1. What goals would you like to achieve during your time on the board?

The major goals I would like to achieve include assisting Michigan Technological University in remaining fiscally strong, supporting efforts to implement the University's strategic plan, helping to maximize high quality educational opportunities for all qualified students, and preparing students for the economic and professional demands of the 21st century workplace.

2. In your discussions with the governor's office prior to your appointment, what was the general charge given to you?

To be a dedicated Board of Control member who will serve the interests of the people of Michigan and the continued growth and vitality of Michigan Technological University.

3. Over the last 15 or 20 years it seems that all state universities have been expanding programs to try to offer everything to everyone. Do you think this is a good idea?

After spending many years as a science teacher, I feel that it is particularly important for an institution like Michigan Technological University to remain focused on the critical STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) related programs. It is difficult for me to address the offerings of other universities, but it is important that Michigan Tech continue its remarkable programs that last year graduated 83% of their students in STEM related fields, which is so critically important for Michigan's economic growth and prosperity.

4. Should the University of Michigan, Michigan State University and Wayne State University be separately funded?

From my limited perspective, I believe that ideally, there should be a single higher education funding bill that focuses on the programs that are most beneficial to the State of Michigan's economic growth and well being. A concerted effort should be made to explore all possibilities and configurations that would benefit the continued health as well as growth of these institutions before such a decision is made.

5. Do you think your university has done a good job of controlling costs? Where would you find additional cost savings?

In as much as I am aware, MTU has done a fine job of working to control costs under ever-increasing constraints and socioeconomic burdens. I know that providing a quality education at any level can be viewed as a costly undertaking, however education is in actuality an investment in our human capital, which requires the best possible human talent and appropriate facilities. I am not aware of everything which the University has done thus far, but I am aware that Michigan Tech offers a very high quality education and some 97% of graduates are placed. In this regard, the marketplace becomes an important yardstick to measure the relative value of the investment by students and their parents. As always, I will be committed to finding additional cost savings wherever possible, while simultaneously recognizing that Michigan Tech is in the unique position of having the highest ratio of traditionally expensive-to-offer programs of any university in the State of Michigan.

6. What type of outcomes should the university measure to determine if it is being successful (i.e., graduation rates, how long it took to graduate, job placement in the graduates major, etc.)? Does your university currently do anything like this?

As my previous answer mentions, the marketplace is a good indicator-measurement to determine if students are being educated for the needs of the economy and society. Clearly MTU has done an excellent job as evidenced by the number of alumni in science and engineering fields working in Michigan. STEM related degrees are critically important to matters of national security, as well as successful competition in the new global economy.

7. What is your position on the importance of state universities as authorizers of charter public schools?

There is no doubt that high quality K-12 education is critically important for all students. Having taught at a magnet public school like Cass Tech, I recognize that we need a variety of public school options and universities can provide a great deal of advice and support related to academic standards and levels of achievement at all K-12 schools. I believe that the question of a university being an authorizer of charter public schools has to be considered on a case by case basis and is very much dependent upon the universities' mission.

8. What is your opinion of the new constitutional amendment banning the use of race and gender preferences in public university admissions? How will you ensure that the amendment is implemented at your university?

There is no doubt that it is critically important for all universities to be committed to diversity and equal opportunity for all students regardless of race, gender, socioeconomic background, etc. We also have to be ever cognizant that the people of the State of Michigan have expressed their position and the judicial system has provided appropriate guidance.

9. In which areas of technological research does your university specialize? How effective is your school at commercializing this research to grow the state's economy?

Michigan Tech is recognized as a leader in STEM related research involving a variety of areas and has been active in the commercialization area. Presently, I have not had the opportunity to delve into the extent of the private sector partnerships, but I do know that the Michigan Tech SmartZone has been extremely successful. In addition, Michigan Tech has a student enterprise program that enables students to gain extensive entrepreneurial experience as these teams work with, and are funded by, industry and others to solve specific real world problems. Eventually, these types of programs will also contribute to inventions and ultimately commercialization.

10. Do you see postsecondary education as mainly a conduit to the work world or is there intrinsic value to pursuing a higher education?

Both. As a longtime committed educator, I believe that the value of higher education would be a conduit to the work world and offer an intrinsic value because students should learn to think critically and be committed to lifelong education. This is not to argue that everyone should attain a doctorate degree, or a master's degree, but it is of note to realize that technology, as an exponential change agent, will require more education and/or re-education as jobs, careers, and technologies evolve. Clearly, I believe that additional education will always be a major contributor to the quality of life for any individual or community.

11. Do you think K-12 institutions are doing a good job of preparing students for college? Why?

I believe there needs to be a stronger commitment to all K-12 institutions to assist them in doing an even better job of preparing students for higher education. The future will belong to those students who have achieved quality education experience. The more that universities like Michigan Tech work with K-12 institutions the more results we will witness of students achieving greater and greater success in higher education and in their professional lives.